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A system and method are provided for real-time call control. When a call is received at a telephone server for a service subscriber, the server identifies the subscriber and retrieves information that will allow the server to contact the subscriber via instant messaging. An instant message is sent to the subscriber, and includes any number of options for controlling or handling the call. The options may be presented as hyperlinks, or the selected option may be returned in another instant message. The subscriber selects an option and communicates it to the server, which effects the selected option. The server may establish an audio connection between the server and the subscriber's computer or communication device (to allow the parties to talk), may transfer the call to another number, play a message for the caller (which may be pre-recorded or recorded in real-time), record a voicemail (which the subscriber may screen), etc.